

July 30, 2009

Dear Members of the Subgroup on Public Engagement to the Interagency Task Force on Ocean Policy:

On behalf of the members of the American Public Works Association (APWA), I want to thank you for providing us with the opportunity to provide written comments, as well as providing an oral presentation on July 17, 2009, to you on the work of the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force. The comments we are submitting today are largely based on the set of principles outlined in the US Commission on Ocean Policy Report, *An Ocean Policy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (Blueprint)*, because it presents a balanced and reasonable approach to developing a comprehensive ocean policy, and on APWA's overarching public policy principles: (1) support for adequate investment in public infrastructure, (2) respect for local authority, (3) reasonable regulations and protection from unfunded mandates, (4) support for streamlining government oversight and (5) support for sustainability and environmental stewardship.

Many of the consequences of climate change relate directly to water resources, including warming air and water, changes in the location and amount of rain and snow, increases in storm intensity, sea level rise and changes in ocean characteristics. Climate change will have numerous and diverse impacts, including impacts on human health, natural systems and the built environment. A changing climate in the years ahead will raise new challenges and opportunities for improving the quality of the nation's ocean, coastal and Great Lakes systems. Obviously, there remains a great deal of uncertainty about the exact scope and timing of the expected impacts on water resources from climate change. As you develop a new comprehensive Federal ocean, coastal and Great Lakes policy, it will be essential that you evaluate how best to achieve the policy's goals in the context of a changing climate. In addition to evaluating the potential impacts of climate change on water resources, APWA recommends that the Task Force use the following principles as a guide:

**1. Develop a policy that takes an ecosystem approach to management of the ocean, coastal and Great Lakes systems.**

The sustainable management of ocean, coastal and Great Lakes ecosystems is a key component to developing a sound and pragmatic Federal policy. Any national policy created by the Administration should focus on management practices that maintain or improve the health and viability of the ocean, coastal and Great Lakes ecosystems. The new Federal ocean, coastal and Great Lakes policy should employ a resource management system that is designed to maintain or enhance ecosystem health and productivity while producing a range of goods and services to meet community needs. Moreover, ecosystem management is an integral part of climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, both key issues for the Task Force to consider. Patterns of disaster risk are changing as a result of climate change and the critical ecosystems that support community resilience are being lost at an exacerbated rate due to mismanagement of ocean, coastal and Great Lakes ecosystems.

## **2. Develop a policy that supports, enhances and respects the critical role of local governments.**

Local government decision makers often have the primary responsibility of establishing and implementing local land use rules that impact the quality and quantity of non-point source pollution degrading our oceans, coastal and Great Lakes ecosystems. In order to draft and implement a seamless and comprehensive Federal policy, local governments must be a part of the decision making and implementation process. According to the Ocean Commission's *Blueprint*, 'Many of the nation's most pressing ocean and coastal issues are local or regional in nature and their resolution requires the active involvement of state and local policymakers, as well as a wide range of stakeholders.' (page 8). Along with adequate local government participation in the development and implementation of a new Federal ocean, coastal and Great Lakes policy, a sound and comprehensive Federal policy must also protect local government partners from the additional burdens imposed by unfunded federal mandates and rules that impose significant costs on already strained local budgets.

## **3. Develop a policy that improves coordination among Federal agencies involved in ocean, coastal and Great Lakes policy.**

Many different Federal agencies are involved in the management and regulation of ocean, coastal and Great Lakes regions causing redundant rules and requirements and a lack of responsiveness to the needs of stakeholders. As the Task Force develops a new policy it is essential that they consider restructuring and improving coordination among all of the Federal agencies with ocean, coastal or Great Lakes policy responsibility.

## **4. Develop a policy that uses an enhanced regional management approach for large multi-jurisdictional watersheds.**

For ocean, coastal and Great Lakes regions a regional management approach may be essential to protecting certain sensitive, large, multi-jurisdictional watersheds such as the Great Lakes, the Chesapeake Bay and Mississippi River/ Delta areas. These watersheds face myriad challenges and obstacles to comprehensive management including multiple political jurisdictions and economic development interests within the watershed. Management of such watersheds is probably better handled through a regional approach that brings together all stakeholders and decision makers to craft a sensible management policy that balances the needs and interests of all jurisdictions within the large watershed. Local government agencies, businesses and residents in such watersheds should participate in setting regional environmental, economic and community priorities, for the highest practicable degree of water quality improvement. It is essential that the Task Force design a process for priority setting that allows governments and watershed manager's enhanced flexibility in scheduling and standard setting within the context of economic, technical and social capabilities. Any national policy setting framework must support water quality managers by providing them with the appropriate data and tools, promoting inclusive resource protection, conducting economic and risk analysis, considering cross media impacts and accounting for regional growth. Water quality priorities and solutions must be established regionally to best address water quality impairment from local and outside sources.

## **5. Develop a policy that places a premium on investing in sound science, data collection and education.**

APWA has found that increased research and development to solve environmental related problems faced by local governments is a pressing need. Research is the foundation of scientific and technical knowledge on water quality and the global environment. New and expanded research efforts are essential to our understanding of water resources and human stresses on them, to technological innovation, and the development of new cost effective approaches to improving water quality. Programs that develop and disseminate both basic and applied research on water issues through financial assistance, program aid, practical field demonstrations and publication of peer reviewed research are essential for creating a sound Federal ocean, coastal and Great Lakes policy.

**6. Develop a policy that manages the oceans, coastal and Great Lakes regions and their watersheds for continued improvement in water quality.**

Many of the current water quality challenges are the result of non-point source pollution and a federal policy that recognizes this changing paradigm is essential to crafting a sound and workable Federal ocean, coastal and Great Lakes policy. New water resource management and restructured water quality initiatives should be supported by the most comprehensive and current scientific information and assessments. Water quality protection efforts must promote problem resolution and enhance pollution prevention, while considering the beneficial uses of each water body individually and the watershed as a whole. A comprehensive means of improving the water quality conditions of the oceans, coastal and Great Lakes ecosystems requires an approach that addresses all pollution sources on a common watershed basis.

**7. Develop a policy that improves the resiliency of coastal communities.**

Sea level rise and coastal hazards are putting human and natural communities along the coasts at greater risk. Local decision makers and planners need to have the appropriate tools to forecast flooding scenarios and sea level rise for their communities so they can plan accordingly. Any Federal policy must consider modifying Federal policies that encourage development in hazard prone areas and revisions to the National Flood Insurance Program. In addition, a comprehensive national policy should improve upon hazards information collection, analysis and dissemination so that local governments can adequately evaluate and prepare for potential hazards. Public works employees respond to and assist in recovering from minor local disasters and emergencies to high profile events such as floods or terrorist attacks and it is critical to the safety of all citizens and the sustainability of all communities that the role of public works professionals is recognized as first responders. Following the 2001 terrorist attacks, the President recognized the crucial first responder role in *Homeland Security Presidential Directive No. 8*.

**8. Develop a policy that conserves and restores ocean, coastal and Great Lakes habitat and shorelines.**

The diverse habitats of the nation's ocean, coastal and Great Lakes ecosystems provide many benefits to coastal communities, including adding to the livability of the community. These diverse habitats filter pollutants from runoff, protect coastal communities from the damaging effects of storms and provide numerous economic opportunities for coastal communities from recreation and tourism. Any national policy developed through this process must support and promote cost effective conservation and restoration programs. In addition conserving and restoring ocean, coastal and Great Lakes habitat, it is equally important that a national policy include appropriate steps to manage sediment and shorelines so that coastal communities are able to continue to protect their citizens and rely on the coastal resource for continued economic development. The national ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes policy should include a national sediment management strategy that balances ecological and environmental needs by utilizing an ecosystem management approach.

**9. Develop a policy that manages the ocean, coastal and Great Lakes systems for continued economic development.**

As the Ocean Commission's *Blueprint* points out coastal activities generate more than \$1 trillion or 1/10 of the nation's gross domestic product and it is essential that any Federal policy and framework recognize the value oceans, coastal and Great Lakes systems provide to the nation's economy. The coasts generate tremendous wealth for local governments and local governments will need to continue to have flexibility and control of the decisions affecting the development of their communities.

**10. Develop a policy that prevents the spread of invasive species.**

The introduction of non-native species into coastal waterways and watershed is causing millions of dollars in costs for monitoring, controlling and remediation of public infrastructure adversely affected by invasive species such as the zebra mussel. The US Fish and Wildlife Service estimates the potential cost of mussel infestation in just the Great Lakes region from 2000 to 2010 will be \$5 billion. Water intake pipes and

similar structures offer ideal habitat for colonization because the continuous flow of water provides a steady food and oxygen supply and carries away waste, while also protecting the mussels against predation. As the impacts of climate change increase, the potential spread and threat of invasive species increases the potential costs to water utilities and public infrastructure. Any new Federal ocean, coastal and Great Lakes policy must recognize the potential impacts of invasive species on public infrastructure.

APWA 's more than 29,000 members plan, design, build and maintain transportation, water supply, sewage and refuse disposal systems, public buildings and other structures and facilities essential to our nation's economy and way of life. Public works professionals serve a diverse range of local communities, municipalities, counties, townships, villages and districts, whether large or small, urban or rural. As stewards of the public infrastructure, APWA members are dedicated to managing and operating public works departments that provide sustainable, safe and reliable service to their communities.

Again, we thank you for the opportunity to provide you with our thoughts as you work to develop a Federal ocean, coastal and Great Lakes policy. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Julia Anastasio (202.218.6750 or [janastasio@apwa.net](mailto:janastasio@apwa.net)) in our Washington, DC office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Noel C. Thompson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Noel" being the most prominent part.

Noel Thompson

President